



Michelangelo: Model Citizen Soldier

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United States defense policy relies on a volunteer force of citizen soldiers serving in reserve, National Guard and state militia units. These patriots apply their civilian skills, along with military training, to military operations when needed.

Michelangelo was a 16th century model of such a citizen soldier.

Michelagnolo di Ludovico Buonarroti-Simoni was born to the Florentine Buonarroti-Simoni family on 6 March 1475. Before his death in 1564 he would become known as the greatest sculptor of the Italian Renaissance. He would also become recognized as an accomplished architect, painter and poet. The great accomplishments in these arts however have historically overshadowed one of Michelangelo's brilliant achievements—he was also a successful military engineer. The man who created the *Pieta*, the *David* and the Sistine Chapel ceiling also created the fortifications of Florence.

Michelangelo was Renaissance man. He lived in an age without obsession for professional specialization. It was thought perfectly reasonable for a person to apply talents to many pursuits, including government and war. Because of this faith in the broad capacity of the

human mind, the artist Michelangelo's offer to design the fortifications for the Florentine Republic was gratefully accepted.

In 1527 the Florentines expelled the de' Medici family rulers and established a republic. The pope and the emperor allied their forces to restore the de' Medici rule.

On 4 October 1528, fearing an attack by the imperial army, Michelangelo met with other republicans to discuss the city's fortifications. Michelangelo argued for fortifying a vital sector of the city's defensive line—the hill of San Miniato. His arguments were persuasive, and, on 10 January 1529 he was elected to the fortification council [*Nove della Milizici*].

On 6 April 1529 he was appointed governor general in charge of fortifications [*Governatore e procuratore generale sopra alla fabrica et fortificazione delle mura della citta di Firenze*] and head of the supreme council of war [*Dieci della Guerra*] which administered a militia system designed by Machiavelli.

Before constructing the Florence fortifications, Michelangelo studied the defenses at Pisa, Livorno and Ferrara during the summer of 1529. At Pisa he advised the militia council on the methods which could be adopted for the defense of the Arno area. On 9 September, he returned to Florence to direct the construction of the fortifications at San Miniato.

Apparently fearing a plot against his life by Florentines loyal to the de' Medici rulers, he withdrew to Venice on 21 September 1529. However, after the allied armies invested Florence on 10 October 1529, he returned to the city to courageously perform his citizen soldier duties until the capitulation of Florence on 12 August 1530.

The defenses designed by Michelangelo held throughout the siege. The Florence Republic fell because of treachery from within the city.

After the war Michelangelo was pardoned by Clement VII and lived on to complete some of his greatest works of art.

Unfortunately little remains of Michelangelo's fortifications except for broken wall remnants in the San Miniato hill vicinity. However, there were apparently sufficient remains of the fortifications during the 17th century for Sebastian Vauban, the French military engineering genius, to study in detail.

There are some of Michelangelo's drawings of planned fortifications kept in the Casa Buonarroti in Florence. It is uncertain whether the Florence defenses were on those drawings, but they do illustrate Michelangelo's creativity. During an age when fortifications were constructed with protruding firing positions, Michelangelo designed less vulnerable concaved firing ports within his bastions. His brilliantly designed interlocking fields of artillery fire

originating from the protection of curved recesses in the fortification walls could be appreciated and admired by modern ground commanders today.

Michelangelo died in Rome on 18 February 1564 and his body taken to Florence—the city he defended in battle. There a funeral was held for the citizen soldier and one of the world's greatest artistic geniuses, a man accomplished in the Renaissance arts: sculpture, painting, architecture, poetry and military engineering.

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